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Johnson, Humphrey Extol C.I.A.'s Work As Agency Turns 20

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18—

The Central Intelligence Agency was praised by President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey today for its 20 years as the No. 1 American intelligence service.

"The American people feel better because there is a C.I.A.," Vice President Humphrey told officials and employees of the agency. He spoke at an award ceremony at the organization's headquarters at nearby Langley, Va.

President Johnson sent a letter, which was read at the ceremony, calling the agency the best intelligence service in the world.

Yesterday was the agency's 20th anniversary. Several hundred employees received certificates today marking 10, 15 and 20 years' employment. Richard Helms, the Director of Central Intelligence, said 803 persons had been with the agency 20 years.

Only passing allusion was made to the fact that the agency's 20th year had been its most difficult in its relations with the public. Controversy over its behind-the-scenes work, such as its alleged aid in overthrowing foreign governments, reached a peak earlier this year with the disclosure that the agency had financially supported a number of private organizations at home as well as abroad.

"You can't expect in a free society to be immune from crit-

icism," Mr. Humphrey said in an extemporaneous address.

"But remember," he said, "if you weren't being criticized, you wouldn't be doing anything. What you're doing is of vital importance. . . . The American people feel better because there is a C.I.A."

The President wrote, "You give us information on which decisions affecting the course of history are made."

He said the nation relied on the agency's dedication to truth and on its commitment to the democratic ideal. "I believe our trust is well placed," he said.

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